Social-Emotional Learning Can Promote Mental Wellness: Essential in Times of Crisis

Student mental wellness matters now more than ever. Every young person will be affected by COVID-19 in some way, and schools must provide supports that serve the mental well-being of young people.

By providing all young people with supports that promote their mental wellness, we can promote their well-being and help prevent harm during these distressing times. Supports for student mental wellness must vary and be responsive to students' specific needs, especially during and after the COVID-19 emergency. Universal social-emotional learning (SEL) is an indispensable part of this equation because it can decrease emotional distress for young people and enhance their positive development.[1,2]

Universal SEL Provides a Solid Foundation on Which to Develop Mental Wellness Supports

Access to SEL is more critical than ever because SEL promotes student mental wellness and can help young people manage mental health challenges or crises.[3] Particularly in these times, it's vital for schools and school systems to:

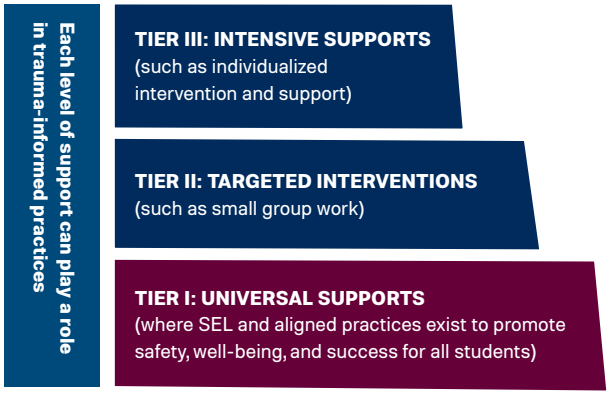
- Implement SEL programs universally—meaning for all young people—as a best practice[4] to help young people recognize and regulate strong emotions and cope better in challenging and stressful situations
- Provide social-emotional learning programs as a foundation on which to develop additional mental wellness supports, such as group or individual counseling, which can be efficiently organized under a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS)[5] and similar frameworks
- Teach social and emotional skills as a Tier I support for all young people so mental health providers gain capacity to focus on Tier II and Tier III supports
- Employ SEL to mitigate risks associated with trauma, such as sexual abuse and social isolation,[6] by fostering SEL-related protective factors, such as connectedness, problem-solving, and healthy communication[7]

Some initial resources for crisis support are:

National Hopeline Network:
800-442-HOPE (4673)

Crisis Text Line:
Text HOME to 741741

MentalHealth.gov:
877-726 4727


Each level of support can play a role in trauma-informed practices
TIER III: INTENSIVE SUPPORTS
(such as individualized intervention and support)
TIER II: TARGETED INTERVENTIONS
(such as small group work)
TIER I: UNIVERSAL SUPPORTS
(where SEL and aligned practices exist to promote safety, well-being, and success for all students)

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SEL Can Be Done While Learning Remotely

States such as Kansas, Mississippi, Utah, and New Mexico are incorporating SEL into their remote-learning guidance and response to COVID-19.[8] Additionally, Committee for Children is providing online support and free resources to make SEL possible in remote-learning settings; you can find these resources here.

Policy Recommendations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Prioritize young people's well-being by increasing access to mental wellness supports that mitigate risk factors and promote resilience.
- Prioritize and coordinate universal SEL as part of a comprehensive program to promote mental well-being for all students.
- Include SEL in remote-learning guidance and planning.
- Increase funding available for universal SEL in coordination with more intensive mental wellness supports that reach across all learning settings, whether in school, after school, or during remote learning.

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